

DE RUEHAK #0116/01 0221101
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 221101Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SESTAT WASHDC PRIORITY 0641
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0864
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0005
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN PRIORITY 1262
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000116

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2026

TAGS: MARR MOPS PREL PGOV TU IZ AR

SUBJECT: TURKISH DEFMIN GONUL'S VISIT: SECURITY COOPERATION
IN THE FACE OF POLITICAL CHALLENGES

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Minister of Defense Gonul's January 25-26 visit, preceding the February visits of Foreign Minister Gul and Chief of the General Staff GEN Buyukanit, provides an opportunity to reaffirm the US commitment on Iraq; urge a measured Turkish response to a possible Congressional Armenian genocide resolution that does not harm ongoing operations; and reaffirm the value of the bilateral defense procurement relationship. Gonul, whose name has been mentioned as a possible Presidential candidate, will likely deliver a tough message on Turkey's disappointment at the lack of concrete action against the PKK following GEN (ret) Ralston's appointment as Special Envoy and warn that an Armenian genocide resolution would severely harm the bilateral relationship, including defense cooperation. The January 25 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) signing provides an opportunity to highlight the mutual benefits of a strategic defense cooperation partnership. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION-YEAR POLITICKING

¶2. (C) Election-year politicking in advance of May Presidential and November parliamentary elections is in full swing and government rhetoric on issues like Iraq, the PKK and a Congressional Armenian genocide resolution is sharpening. Infighting among secularists, Islamists and nationalists is increasing and all regard the US both as a convenient target and a source of support. PM Erdogan's potential Presidential aspirations have heightened civil-military tensions in recent months. Public statements by CHOD Buyukanit, Land Forces Commander Basbug and others criticizing EU officials who suggest the military is crossing civilian red lines, announcing the break in bilateral military relations with France in advance of a government statement, and reminding the public and the government of the military's responsibility to protect the country from fundamentalist and separatist threats are interpreted by many as a warning to the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in general and PM Erdogan in specific. MND Gonul has been suggested as a possible alternative AKP candidate given his national stature, good working relationship with the military and lack of significant political baggage, and (significantly for the military) a wife who doesn't wear a head scarf

IRAQ AND THE PKK -- PRESSING FOR CONCRETE RESULTS

¶3. (C) There is one issue on which the military and government speak with a single voice -- Iraq. Turkish press have suggested that PM Erdogan is sending Gonul to Washington to deliver a tough message on Iraq. Turkey is concerned about what it sees as Iran's influence in Iraq and the potential for the country to splinter along ethnic lines. The prospect of a 2007 referendum on Kirkuk exacerbates the Turkish fears of a Kurdish annexation of the oil-rich province that will lead to massive inter-communal violence, and ultimately the dissolution of the country. Additionally, the brief honeymoon following Gen (ret) Ralston's August 2006 appointment as Special Envoy to Counter the PKK has ended with the Government of Turkey (GOT) frustrated at what it views as a glaring lack of concrete results.

¶4. (C) The potential for a cross-border operation is again front page news, with press speculation that Ralston's appointment was a delaying tactic to keep Turkey from conducting an operation and public statements by PM Erdogan, Turkish Special Envoy GEN Baser and others reasserting Turkey's right to conduct a cross-border operation (CBO). The opposition is calling for a parliamentary vote on a CBO. There are indications that a large number of troops and equipment remain stationed along the Iraq border where they continue to conduct operations against the PKK. The December and January arrests of Iranian terrorist suspects in Iraq reconfirmed in Turkish minds the US ability to act decisively

when it is in our interest. Providing a brief respite from the negative press was the January 17 search of Makhmour Refugee Camp by Iraqi Security Forces, which has been embraced by the GOT as potentially the first step of a comprehensive strategy to combat the PKK in Iraq. In the absence of additional measures however, this goodwill will be short-lived.

SHAPING TURKEY'S RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION

15. (C) Turkish military and civilian officials warn that the passage of a Congressional Armenian genocide resolution would result in devastating consequences to the bilateral relationship, but decline to give specifics. If the TGS response to the French parliamentary vote to criminalize denial of an Armenian genocide is any indicator, military visits, exercises, exchanges, training and \$14 billion in potential procurement could be at risk, including: Turkey's Level III participation in JSF and its \$5-\$6 billion purchase of 100 aircraft; the \$1.65 billion purchase of 30 F-16s, the \$1.65 billion upgrade of Turkey's current F-16 fleet; a \$1.5-\$2 billion FMS purchase of attack helicopters; a \$1.3 billion Patriot/PAC III purchase; \$800 million utility helicopter buy; and a \$500 million heavy-lift helicopter purchase.

16. (C) Worse, however, would be a decision to reduce or cancel general and cargo hub-related overflight clearances and Incirlik cargo hub and Habur Gate Ground Line of Communication (GLOC) transit authority. Together these transit hubs facilitate the distribution of almost 60% of air cargo destined for OIF, 25% of Coalition fuel and 50% of humanitarian fuel for the Iraqi people, as well as significant support for OEF in Afghanistan.

17. (C) At every opportunity we are emphasizing to Turkish officials the administration's efforts to oppose such a resolution and to press for the GOT's own constructive efforts towards that end. We will continue to press for a reasoned response to a resolution that does not jeopardize the long-term relationship for short-term political gains. The government's immediate condemnation of the January 19 murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in Istanbul and the arrest of a suspect the next day is a positive sign.

TURNING AROUND THE DEFENSE INDUSTRY RELATIONSHIP

18. (C) The military's increasing influence over defense procurement decisions since GEN Buyukanit became CHOD in August 2006 had been the subject of press and industry speculation but difficult to demonstrate. However, we may be seeing the first evidence with decisions by the Executive Defense Committee (Prime Minister, Defense Minister, CHOD) in December to exclusively purchase the Joint Strike Fighter rather than a mix of JSF and the Eurofighter or just the Eurofighter and to postpone the selection of a winner in the attack helicopter tender (South Africa's Denel and Italy's Agusta Westland are the finalists) and request price and availability data for a Foreign Military Sales (FMS) purchase of Boeing's Apache or Bell's Cobra helicopter for comparison. (Note: Details on Boeing and Bell FMS alternatives for an attack helicopter should be submitted to TGS in early February.)

19. (C) Press articles criticizing the military's decision to allow Lockheed Martin to do most of the F-16 upgrade work and a possible purchase of 30 new F-16s with limited local content suggest that the Defense Industry Undersecretariat (SSM) is pushing back. SSM displeasure with Turkish Air Force Commander Gen Comert's decision to send pilots to test fly a Raytheon T-6 airplane trainer became newspaper fodder when a letter from SSM U/S Bayer to Comert was leaked to the press. The letter criticized Comert's decision to send pilots to test the plane of a company that chose not to participate in the trainer tender and to do so before testing the planes of the Brazilian and South Korean companies which did participate.

110. (C) To demonstrate to the military and to the United States that it does not wish to exclude US firms from Turkish defense tenders following the decision of US companies to submit no bid or a non-compliant bid on three 2006 tenders (attack helicopter, airplane trainer, utility helicopter), SSM is negotiating with Sikorsky the parameters of a "Strategic Partnership" which could include Sikorsky production of utility helicopters for the military and forestry service as well as purchase of an armed Black Hawk in place of an attack helicopter and Turkish participation in

some aspect of International Black Hawk production. Such an agreement, if realized, would signal a sea change in SSM's attitude towards US defense companies.

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